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ARE THE MEXICAN PEOPLE CAPABLE OF GOVERNING THEMSELVES

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The question: Are the Mexican people capable of self-government? In the light of present facts and of the history of the country from her independence from Spain a century ago, it seems to require a negative answer, because during that period there was only about thirty years of peace which came under the autocratic government of General Porfirio Diaz.

I intend, however, to demonstrate that the Mexican people can govern themselves, and that all the restless life of Mexico is due to social factors which can be controlled and must be if we ever shall have peace and orderly progress; if we ever have to meet our obligations to the world, and the responsibilities inherent to our geographical position, and to the wealth lying in our soil.

In order to support my conclusion let me begin by stating facts which nobody can deny:

FIRST FACT

All Americans who have been in Mexico, as serious observers, can bear witness to the statement that there are in Mexico intelligent lawyers who would refuse their support to any cause, no matter how promising of high fees and compensation, whenever they see that justice would be

hurt thereby; physicians who are not business men, and who know how to combine science and charity; merchants who have laboriously built up fortunes, without any one observing that they defaulted on their obligations—not even now, when the revolution has destroyed so many fortunes honestly won, and affords a pretext for defaulting; business men who show executive ability, which is one of the greatest needs of a good ruler; and farmers, hard workers, who live a simple life and are contented when they leave for future generations a new dam or a new ditch for the irrigation of their land, a new plot reclaimed for cultivation, or a new tree by the roadside for the relief of the traveler. Finally, I do not know of any Mexican who does not love his country, even though that love may be misguided or overshadowed by passions of a less elevated character; it is a love which is everywhere demonstrated by the fact that in spite of the great sufferings and misery of Mexico at the present time, and of the benefits which may be derived from naturalization as a citizen of the United States, I do not know of any Mexican who has asked for his first papers in this country, because, while we all admire the United States, we cannot help feeling an irresistible desire that there, where our forefathers lie, there our remains may be united with theirs forever in the bosom of the same mother country.

If these virtues are the crucial test of a man capable of undertaking the government of a country, we have plenty of men who possess them, who know how to govern and how to sacrifice themselves for the love of it if need there be. If I had the time, I could tell you wonderful tales of sacrifice for the good of our people and for the glory of Mexico.

SECOND FACT

The second undeniable fact is that Mexico was in peace during three centuries under the Spanish rule. Much has been said to discredit that rule: to think of the Spanish colonial system is to bring to the mind of many persons tales of slavery, humiliations and atrocities; tales of inquisition and of denial of all rights that we think are most sacred. But it

is my first duty to warn you against such misconceptions of the Spanish régime, because those prejudices which were first spread by malice, are, in my opinion, the source of all the mistakes made in the United States in its relations with Mexico, and the most abundant spring of evil for the latter.

Many persons have heard of the submission under which Spain kept the Indians, but they do not seem to have heard of the submission under which the Indians were accustomed to live from time immemorial under the sway of their native chiefs, and they do not know that some form of subordination was necessary in order to make the Indians who were accustomed to it, contribute to the formation of the new society. They seem not to have heard that the Indians had to give their very flesh for the feasts of their chiefs, and that Spain rescued them from this cannibalistic tribute. They do not seem to have heard either that Mexico was populated, except in a small portion of her southern territory, by hunting tribes, and that Spain organized these tribes into agricultural and industrial towns; that Spain incorporated the prominent Indian families into the Spanish nobility in order to make a practical application of the Christian precept which blots out all differences of race, and makes men equal over the world; that from the beginning of the conquest many Indians were educated by the Spaniards and distinguished themselves among the learned; and that the Spanish language was so widely spread that now, wherever you go in Mexico, you hear Spanish, and in most of the regions the Indians have even forgotten that their tribe had a dialect of its own. They seem not to have heard that the first printing press of America was established in Mexico, and the second University of America was founded in Mexico; that the rich classes of Mexico in the Colonial period could vie with the richest of the world, and that the Mexican archives are filled with the records of their endowments for the civilization of the natives and for the welfare of the people; that the monetary unit of America, India and China was the Mexican peso, showing the economic world power acquired by the country under the Spanish régime; and that the land property of the Indians was preserved

intact—nay it was even increased by Spain. If those persons had merely read the statements made by impartial scientific observers, such as Humboldt, they would know what Mexico contributed in those times to the world in matters of character and culture; they would be able to understand why a peaceful life was lived in that country in previous epochs, when the Spanish customs and methods were not spoiled by unwise imitations.

How can these facts be reconciled with the tales of atrocities so generally spread.

You, in organizing this wonderful Commonwealth, did not experience any of the difficulties which confronted Spain. You could build up a new society upon a basis of freedom and democratic coöperation, because you had an homogeneous cultural ground, the same European mind. You created, we may say, a European freedom, since you fought the Indian almost to his complete extinction, and discouraged the political activities of the negro, where those activities could be effective, until you have practically kept the negro a merely passive element in your political organization. You therefore reared your building entirely to your own satisfaction, without experiencing any of those inconveniences which confront the engineer who undertakes to adapt an old building intended originally for a tenement house, into a big modern factory.

Spain followed an entirely different policy. She tried by all means to save the Indians from the clash with a stronger race, to bring them up to modern culture by slow evolution, through the only possible way—discipline; and, in order to safeguard their civil rights and material interests, Spain withdrew from them, temporarily, the political franchises, except in reference to town government.

When Mexico was open to free trade with other countries, Europeans as well as Anglo-Americans rushed into it, and they were disappointed with what they saw. They saw there a peculiar society, a preposterous organization, a combination of childish mentality with vices which appeared like decadence; most of the people entirely ignorant; some, although possessing a more or less advanced education,

were more inclined to display their knowledge as a token of superiority than as a moral and intellectual asset and practical social force; and, finally, a group of persons really refined and mentally strong who were trying in vain to infuse common sense and good judgment into the public administration. Those foreigners, as a rule, did not go beyond their observation of present facts; they did not realize that that state of affairs was the natural resultant of two opposite forces, the European culture, and the Indian culture which had been fighting each other during three centuries, and that to have arrived at that point had been a wonderful achievement on the part of Spain; they, on the contrary, concluded that the Spanish system of colonization had been a complete failure, that all that was Spanish had to be swept away; and the Anglo-Americans thought, furthermore, that the only remedy which could produce a quick relief was the application of the principles of democracy—that same democracy which in the United States had never been the rule of the Indians or the negroes or any other race but the Europeans. They did not stop to think that the Indians in their own country were left aside, dispossessed and dislodged, abandoned in their primitive savagery; and therefore, they were unable to appreciate the painstaking task of Spain in suppressing cannibalism, in teaching a Christian-like culture and religion, in bringing up those people to that semi-civilization.

I insist on this fact because in my opinion the injustice done to Spain, in not recognizing that during her rule a constant work of civilization was going on in her colonies, with a liberality that would be surprising to many, is a mistake which constitutes a real cancer which eats into all your system of thinking and dealing with the Spanish American countries; and which has been dangerous to us, and may produce many misunderstandings resulting in actual damage to your trade and commerce with our countries. I regard myself as a real and sincere friend of the United States, and at the same time a real Mexican patriot, in warning you against these misrepresentations.

THIRD FACT

I have said that Spain instead of granting political rights to uneducated people, gave them ample protection in their material interests and placed them under strict discipline. This system naturally produced abuses on the part of the superior race, almost inevitable as the result of the survival of the fittest; but in order to reduce these abuses to a minimum so that they would not be a grave obstacle in the cultural development of the country, the king of Spain was scrupulously careful in the selection of his officials; he gave to Mexico statesmen of the highest intellectual and moral character who ever ruled her. Of the 64 viceroys in Mexico during three centuries, no less than twenty could be cited as models of statesmanship; the civic virtues which they displayed, those virtues which were responsible for their success and for the peace of three centuries, were honesty, justice and modesty. Modesty in a ruler is the strongest guaranty for the people that conditions of living and social organization will be studied humbly and attentively, and that dangerous experimental innovations will be prevented, when they are not warranted.

FOURTH FACT

The fourth undeniable fact is that General Porfirio Diaz ruled in peace during thirty years. He went into power by a revolution backed by the intellectual and liberal, as well as by the sound conservative elements of Mexico. The reason for this support is very simple: when General Diaz entered the city of Mexico, after defeating the imperialist forces of Maximilian, he showed great moderation, and also at the same time, great tolerance and sympathy with the enemy; he distinguished himself by surrendering to the federal government some \$250,000 as a surplus, after paying his troops and the administrative expenses of the states under his military command. Thus he appeared before the nation as possessing the qualities of moderation, honesty and administrative ability. From that moment he was a leader. Those qualities were the cause of his success.

When he was president he inaugurated an autocracy in order to continue in power; he had recourse to the electoral farce which in alternation with revolution has always been the method of appointing presidents in Mexico. The necessity of aping the electoral proceedings of the United States, without the indispensable background of a trained people, was responsible for the final undoing of that régime, and for the lowering of the moral character of the people under it. In order to carry on the farce of elections, the political atmosphere of Mexico was filled with lies. The reflections of General Diaz required complicity from the governors of the states down to the mayors of the towns and to the lowest deputy police, and that complicity entailed a full system of abuses, injuries and misrule. The country, however, availed itself of that period of peace to frame an organization, which although primitive and defective, was the natural resultant of two opposite forces: an uneducated people, by racial tendencies and by centuries of tradition looking towards an autocracy, and the necessity of appearing to enforce a political constitution which prescribed methods of government suitable for a different stage of culture. Under those circumstances General Diaz confined himself to the economic development of the country, but, due to the unethical political methods, there resulted an inharmonious accumulation of wealth; and to the education of the people and the reform of the schools, which for the same reason, resulted in mere pedantry. That defective and vicious organization was, however, the natural outgrowth of our own society, the best we could obtain under such adverse circumstances. It could be used as a ground work; it was the painfully built foundation, laboriously designed by the best intellectual elements which helped General Diaz.

That lack of education among the masses, you may argue, was the fault of Spain, and is the unpardonable sin of the upper class of Mexico. This argument leads me to the fifth fact to which I must call your attention.

FIFTH FACT

There is in Washington a bureau which, it seems to me, does not attract great attention; it is called the Commission of Indian Affairs. Its activities and methods are most interesting, and its reports should be read by all those statesmen of the Spanish American countries in which the Indians abound, as is the case in Mexico. After many of the tribes had disappeared and the whole number of Indians within the territory of the United States had been reduced to three hundred thousand, you began to be apprehensive of their complete annihilation, which would mean the passing away of one of the picturesque features of the life of the United States. You felt equally alarmed over the possible destruction of the Indian and of the buffalo, and you provided against such a result by reducing both, the Indian and the buffalo, to reservations in which you could see to it that they were well kept. Once you decided upon this course, you went into the task with the characteristic ardor and impetus which you put into your undertakings. An appropriation, which in 1913 was more than ten million dollars, has been yearly granted for the supervision and education of the natives in the reservations; the rentals of the land belonging to them were also devoted to that use, and even the wages of the Indian workers were put in a bank for their welfare. A system of guardianship was planned; political rights were practically withdrawn from them, and even the disposition of their property was strictly controlled by the inspector of each reservation. In reading the reports of the Commission I have been greatly surprised by the similarity of methods employed by the Commission of Indian Affairs to those of the Spanish missions in Mexico. So striking is that similarity that I could not help thinking that either one of two things is true: that the policy of the Commission of Indian Affairs was planned after that of the Missions, or the system of the latter was so near to perfection that after various centuries, and in spite of the advancement of pedagogical and social science, the Commission of Indian Affairs had been led by force of facts to the same

conclusions. The basis of that system is common sense; they do not aim to develop the Indians by the use of the political franchise, but do try to prepare them for the franchise through education and external discipline, so long as discipline does not come from their own character. They compel the Indians to carry on a more comfortable life in order to make them love sociability and coöperation, from which that comfort must come. After thirty years of this intensive work of civilization, the Commission of Indian Affairs has succeeded in teaching some sixty thousand Indians to read and write.

Now, if with more than ten million dollars a year for the education of merely three hundred thousand Indians in reservations, kept in control by an overwhelming majority of white population, and under the strict discipline of guardianship, you have, as a result of thirty-eight years efforts, taught only sixty thousand Indians to read and write, how much money does Mexico need to develop twelve millions of illiterate population, who show every opposition to be educated, are scattered over the territory of the republic, and are almost incapable of discipline, due to the extreme ideas of democracy and political rights which they have absorbed. And how long will it take to have at least the majority of the population educated in order that under the present system of universal suffrage the educated people of Mexico may have a chance to control the country?

The government of Mexico, however, has shown a great interest in popular education; schools are found practically in all towns; the educational system is so liberal that not only primary schools but all professional schools are free for students, who can undertake any career without the need of paying tuition. Besides the schools of the government, there are others supported by religious or charitable institutions, or endowed, so that if the people do not send their children to school it is because, in some cases, they lack ambition, in others it is due to some economic reason that bars that ambition.

The whole system of education is defective, however, because in educating the people without giving them better

economic opportunities and presenting to them higher standards of morality in political life, many unsatisfied and uncontrolled ambitions are raised which endanger the community. Mexico City, which was better supplied than any other city in the country with educational facilities, showed a greater criminality, because education made the people long for a higher standard of living and made them realize their misery. The problems of Mexico, consequently, must be confronted at the same time from an economic, educational and ethical point of view; to try a solution from one standpoint alone is a vain and dangerous attempt.

The wonder is that with our defective system of education we have succeeded in getting 20 per cent of the population educated (just the same per cent that you have obtained among the Indian population, with all your inexhaustible resources); and, moreover, that we have succeeded in raising many Indians to prominent places in the scientific, artistic, and political fields, even to occupy the Presidency of the Republic, while in the United States I have never heard of any Indian distinguishing himself in any way whatsoever.

An American explained to me that this was due to the fact that the Indians on this side of the Rio Grande are very stupid and lazy, and the other side of the river they are very intelligent and ambitious; but he did not tell me to what circumstances the psychological effect of the line of the Rio Grande was due.

As a matter of fact there is no such psychological mystery in this; the explanation is very simple. You are willing to give the Indians education, but you will never give them a social status on the same footing as a European. To think of an Indian being a President of the United States is like thinking of a whale building a nest in a tree.

In Mexico, on the other hand, if we do not have so many and such good schools, we have instead that sense of equality inherited with our Spanish traditions. We welcome an Indian in our highest society whenever he adopts our manners and culture; an Indian can marry the daughter of an upper class family if he only shows a proper behavior; and if he is a learned man, the Mexican young men are proud of calling

him their teacher, just as in the colonial times the Indian entered the ranks of the Spanish nobility and the descendants of Indians were appointed viceroys. That moral equality, encouraging the Indian, is responsible for his success in life, and explains the mystery of the Rio Grande.

SIXTH FACT

Finally we have another undeniable fact, namely, the decisive influence of the United States on Mexico. The first revolution in Mexico was the effect of two causes: the condition of Spain under the sway of Napoleon, and the desire of the Mexican people to take advantage of that condition—imitating the United States—believing that independence from Spain would produce for Mexico the same results that the United States had secured by its independence from England. Although Mexico was a country which had long lived under a centralized form of government, and that common sense indicated that centralization was a benefit, they nevertheless created a fictitious federation in order to imitate the United States; the consequent endless struggle between federalists and centralists with all its sad consequences, was at least the pretext for uprisings, revolutions, and counter revolutions, which disturbed Mexico until 1860, when Juarez, with the moral and material support of the United States, succeeded in establishing definitely the federal system. And finally, I do not see any better illustration of that influence in Mexican affairs than the policy of the present administration in overthrowing Huerta and substituting Carranza, with the results that all Americans and Mexicans know well.

These are the most substantial facts in regard to Mexico, and the conclusions must be the direct consequence of those facts.

The first conclusion is that in those periods in which Mexico has enjoyed peace, this peace has been produced by the rule of the cultured section of the people and the subordination of the unlearned class to that rule. If the country is to be governed in accordance with the rule of univer-

sal suffrage, then the majority of the population, that is to say, the illiterate section of it, will have the control of the cultured class. In other words, that class which for its own benefit was subordinated under the Spanish régime, which in the United States is kept under guardianship, would rule in Mexico. If such should be the case, we must in candor confess that the Mexican people are not capable of self-government. This is mere common sense. The Indians and illiterate class of Mexico do not know in some cases even the Spanish language, do not know the political constitution, and the functions of the different branches of the administration. If their vote is to decide, then they will be the tools of wire pullers who may preach to them democracy or communism or any other word which will excite them and stir them into warlike action; or they will be the raw material for the government electoral machine. In both cases the sober honest citizen prefers to abandon the field to his opponents because he can see no possibility of overcoming that machinery, nor is he disposed to compete in machinations. There is no country in the world in which the most intelligent and capable class, in the long run, does not obtain in the government the preëminence it deserves, unless there is some external power, which interferes with the inner forces of that country.

But, on the other hand, if the Mexican people are left to their own resources and discretion they will prove their capacity for self-government, just as they give daily proofs of their intelligence as members of the professional classes, and of their ability and honesty as business men. If they do not find it necessary to misrepresent the facts, they may start again that work of civilizing the Indians which they undertook in the epochs of greater prosperity for Mexico. Let the educated class of Mexico assume before the world the responsibility for the culture of their own fellow citizens. They will show that they are trustworthy.

I am not advocating an autocratic irresponsible government; what I believe is a primary necessity for the life of Mexico is to restrict the exercise of political rights in Federal matters to those who at least know how to read and

write, who thus have an opportunity to know what politics and justice and political economy may mean. If we continue the rule of universal suffrage, we may have the opposite effect of what you had in the South, where the majority of the whites suppressed the vote of the colored people, and we may be forced to suffer the well-known evils of the reconstruction period, with all the political manoeuvres of the carpet-baggers. In Mexico the enormous majority of the unlearned class discourages and overcomes the vote of the literate. If you remember the history of the Indian territory of the United States, and the reasons why you were compelled to withdraw the political franchise from the Indians there, you may realize that the present situation in Mexico is a mere duplication of conditions in that territory; and you may be compelled to admit that my suggestion is the only possible solution for the Mexican problem.

Up to the present the adoption of any kind of literacy test for the exercise of the franchise has met with opposition principally from two sources: the government which controls the illiterate class by means of the political machinery of the administration; and the clergy which hopes to control it by means of religious fanaticism and prejudice. The strength of this opposition comes from current opinions on democracy and from the indiscriminate application of the principle of equality; this opposition is so powerful that even men of culture and character do not have the courage to express their conviction and to attack universal suffrage, for the benefit, nay, for the very life of Mexico as an independent country. It is due to my lack of political ambition, that I can state the truth, and can speak with the utmost positiveness and frankness.

The second conclusion refers to the influence of the United States upon Mexico. If that influence, due to geographical proximity, has been so decisive in the past and continues so decisive in the present, let us utilize that for the reconstruction of Mexico. The only way in which we may succeed is by securing the alliance of men of intelligence and high character in the two countries; then instead of preach-

ing to the Mexicans the enforcement of principles the practicability of which is doubtful, explain to us the valuable lessons which you have learned from your dealings with people of a lower degree of culture; your experience in the South during the reconstruction period, your troubles and difficulties with the Indian Territory in the middle of the nineteenth century, the valuable suggestions which may be gathered from the methods adopted by the Commission of Indian Affairs, as well as from the studies made with laborers of different races and origin, which are found in the reports of the Department of Labor. If you wish really to help us to organize our country as it must be in accordance with existing facts and future possibilities, do not pay so much attention to what the politicians of Mexico may say in order to gain your support; notice carefully what they do in order to obtain the support of their own people, particularly whether they or their followers grow rich in their campaign for democracy and the welfare of their country, and reserve your applause for those who deserve it from an ethical point of view. Then, as the blame or the applause of the people of the United States is in itself a strong force in the world, the whole world may see that that force is used in the service of practical ethics, and Mexico will be the first to reap the benefits thereof. That is the only thing that I think we need from the United States for our reconstruction, for a sound and solid reconstruction. Nothing else. Is the United States willing to give us that help?

Now it seems that a new set of men are coming into power in Mexico. I, for the benefit of my country and the country of my forefathers, and that of my children, and for the fair, friendly and beneficial intercourse between Mexico and the United States, wish for the new rulers, whoever they may be, those virtues which characterized all of our good rulers in the past: honesty, modesty, and justice, in order to make good my last conclusion: that the Mexican people, if left alone to the natural forces of their own society, are capable of self-government.